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AN INVITATION TO STATEWIDE CURRICULUM BUILDING.

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BECAUSE THE AUTHOR FEELS THAT THE REGULAR ACADEMIC CURRICULUM DOES NOT MEET THE LIFE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED, HE SUGGESTS THAT THE CENTER OF INTEREST OR UNIT APPROACH BE USED. THIS TYPE OF CURRICULUM AND GROUPING FOR INSTRUCTION IS DISCUSSED. LISTS OF SUGGESTED CENTER OF INTEREST UNITS ARE PRESENTED FOR RETARDED CHILDREN OF VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS. (EB)

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WISCONSIN

SUGGESTED CENTERS of INTEREST for MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN

Bulletin #3

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"AN INVITATION TO STATEWIDE CURRICULUM BUILDING"

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SUGGESTED CENTERS OF INTEREST RELATING TO THE PERSISTING LIFE SITUATIONS FACED BY THE RETARDED

Overview of the Curriculum

The persisting life needs and interests of the mentally retarded cannot be adequately met by their exposure to the regular academic curriculum. Special classroom curriculums should be designed to allow for individual differences in rates of mental development and should be geared to the developmental levels, specific weaknesses, and abilities of the pupils.

In a good school system the philosophy and objectives of a program for the mentally retarded do not differ basically from the overall objectives sought for the normal child. The broad objectives of education in our American democracy, as outlined by the Educational Policies Commission in 1946, apply equally to all children. These are:

Objectives of self-realization
Objectives of human relationship
Objectives of economic efficiency
Objectives of civic responsibility

Only the *approach* to meeting these broad objectives differs from that used in teaching the normal child. The curriculum of the special class must be so designed and utilized, however, that the special needs of the retarded are met in as complete and efficient a manner as is humanly feasible. To meet these special needs and interests Wisconsin's special class teachers have quite generally based their curricular approaches upon the persisting life situations or needs approach advocated by Stratemeyer *et al.** Whether they have consciously employed this curriculum design or have done so unwittingly is irrelevant here. The point is that this curriculum approach, with a number of variations, appears to be more frequently utilized than other designs, e.g., the subject matter or related subject areas approach.

In utilizing the persisting life situations approach, or for that matter, in teaching via the unit method, a teacher is greatly aided if she has at her disposal a resource guide or a specific unit which broadly outlines the content area of the center of interest to be covered. In the past special class teachers' instructional efforts have been seriously hampered by a lack of resource guides and well-conceived sub-topic units concerned with subject matter content. This is in direct contrast to the assistance available to the regular classroom teacher in the form of teachers' manuals, workbooks, resource guides and so forth. It is precisely because of this lack of resource material that a special teacher frequently will fall back to reliance upon a traditional subject matter or "watered down" curriculum approach.

Within the context of this discussion a *resource guide* is thought of as a collection of materials and resources related to a broad topic and organized in a functional way for use by the classroom teacher. A *teaching unit* or *center of interest unit*, on the other hand, is conceived of as a sub-topic to be found within the broader resource guide. In short, the teaching unit is an organized subdivision which falls between the resource unit and the actual lesson in the classroom.**

For example, a resource guide concerned with *Travel* may have a series of teaching units or sub-topics in such areas as:

Travel in Our Neighborhood
The Airplane
The School Bus
The Railroad Station

**Developing A Curriculum for Modern Living* (2nd edition, Revised), by Stratemeyer, F.B., Forkner, H.L., McKim, M.G., and Passow, A.H., Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1957.
***Unit Teaching in the Elementary School,* by Hanna, Potter and Hagaman, Rinehart Co., New York, 1958.

History of Statewide Curriculum Activities in Special Education

As early as 1956 curricular publications emerging from the Bureau encouraged the incorporation of center of interest or teaching units in the daily special class program to better meet the recurring life needs of the retarded. These suggested centers of interest units were proposed for the use of special teachers in instructing educable mentally retarded children. At that time it was stated that a purposeful learning environment should:

1. Offer an effective laboratory for resolving recurring problems in realistic living and helping train children in good community participation.
2. Further the therapeutic effectiveness of good mental hygiene.
3. Teach citizenship and socialized behavior based on privileges and responsibilities.
4. Aid in developing desirable habits, attitudes and appreciations.

Beginning in 1958 it was recognized that a mere listing of suggested unit topics would not provide the special class teacher with the needed content material required for effective teaching. Subsequently, invitations were mailed to all special teachers in the state requesting their participation in developing the suggested unit topics into out-of-the classroom descriptions or outlines of actual unit work carried on. This project was conceived of as a means of developing a series of "We Do It This Way" resource guides which would include a comprehensive group of teaching units spanning the pre-academic to the senior high level. Teacher response was excellent and approximately 50% of Wisconsin's special class teachers contributed material for this statewide project. In addition, many summer workshoppers contributed teaching units to this state endeavor. Several resource guides related to the Fine and Practical Arts have been published under the titles of *A Potpourri of Ideas for Teachers of the Mentally Retarded* (Volume I, August, 1959, Volume II, December, 1962). Work is currently under way on resource guides for the primary, intermediate and secondary levels and these guides will be released as soon as editing and publishing details are completed.

Current Curriculum Efforts

Concurrently with the development of a series of "We Do It This Way" resource guides, a statewide curriculum project is under way, the purpose being the development of a broad comprehensive state educable curriculum guide based upon the "persisting life situations" curriculum model. This state curriculum guide is perceived of as presenting a general broad curriculum framework which permits local flexibility and implementation through the use of locally developed sub-topics or teaching units.

This state curriculum guide will include columnar suggestions of center of interest units or sub-topics to be pursued in meeting the twelve major objectives of the persisting life needs curriculum design. As previously indicated, mere listings of suggested units or topics is insufficient. Therefore, the "We Do It This Way" resource guides being prepared at the state level should aid local teachers in implementing the persisting life objectives by presenting specific and suggestive content matter for various areas of living and learning.

On the following pages the reader will find the original list of *Suggested Centers of Interest* utilized by special teachers in selecting and developing descriptive units of work. A number of these sub-topics were not chosen for development. Bureau consultants are again extending a statewide invitation to special room teachers to select one of these sub-topics for tryout and development into a descriptive teaching unit. Selection should be made from among those sub-topics showing the following symbol (●), since these were not previously developed into center of interest units.

The Special Education Curriculum

When the special teacher designs her daily schedule in terms of a developmental program reflecting the day-to-day experiences and impacts of the home, school, neighborhood, community and state, she then is effectively realizing the objectives of a persisting life needs special education curriculum. At the

elementary level emphasis is primarily on the acquisition of basic skills, facts, simple routines and habit training. However, an all-encompassing program provides not only developmental instruction in basic skill subjects, but also provides for functional utilization of these acquired skills in integrated centers of interest, cores or units concerned with the persisting life situations encountered by the retarded.

At the *adolescent level* an even greater proportion of time should be devoted to the functional use of tool subjects in stressing training for participation in the occupational world as a competent and effective adult. At this level the special education curriculum stresses occupational information and education with particular emphasis on personal, social and occupational goals in addition to academic skills. Effective and affective living are the long range goals we seek.

It should be mentioned that there are desirable experiences at each developmental level which do not always lend themselves to functional integration with the suggested center of interest activities. Certain activities in physical education, crafts, music, art and reading have certain specific values which should not be overlooked in any attempt at integration.

General Principles in Grouping for Instruction

Achievement tests are administered to determine where a child is, academically speaking, and in order that grouping for effective instruction may be carried out. Ideally, instruction should be individualized, Realistically, regardless of popular opinion, it is almost impossible to instruct a group of children on an individual basis. We need to group for economy of instructional time to enable youngsters to encounter all of the various skills, experiences, and persisting life problems.

How may teachers effectively teach the basic skills and still find time to develop units of work or centers of interest which meet the needs and interest of retarded pupils? More effective grouping for basic skills instruction is one method. Integration of tool subjects in functional approaches to centers of interest is one approach to economic and efficient use of the teacher's time.

It is recommended that in any given subject, no more than three to four groups be organized. Heterogeneous, one room special classes will tend to have more groups, whereas homogeneous classes located in larger cities having several classes tend to have fewer groups. Oftentimes we hear teachers remark that they have five or six reading groups and have little time for anything else but instruction in the basic skills.

We would advise that in situations that appear to have a multiplicity of groups, fewer groups could conceivably be established by placing borderline cases in the nearest appropriate group. A child reading 1.9, for example, and another reading 3.1 might be placed with second grade readers. Word analysis, a phonic approach, word attack skills and the use of context clues may all be taught from a second grade level as well as from a first or third.

This does not imply that we neglect the more competent child in the reading group, or allow the least competent to flounder. But, primarily, we are teaching basic skills and are providing for practice and mastery of new skills.

The center of interest or unit approach will provide for the 3.1 and 1.9 reader. If we have selected, for example, the unit, "How Our Homes are Built," the functional phase will provide for reading at the child's own level of ability, for the use of related concepts at his level of comprehension and for the utilization of all basic skills mastered by the entire group.

The centers of interest are based, mainly, upon social studies, science, health-safety and occupational areas of interest. These units are chosen with reference to chronological ages, group maturity and group interest. Functional reading in these units need not necessarily be provided daily, but should be scheduled several times during a given week.

The basic skills program is based upon achievement levels and classroom functioning levels. A child may be in a third grade reading group and a first grade numbers' group. The class as a whole may be concentrating on one area of interest, using a varied basic skills approach to the related reading and number skills involved in the activity.

With these suggestions as guiding principles, the special class teacher should be able to incorporate units of interest within the framework of her daily schedule. Pre-academic through intermediate levels might spend one to one and a half hours each day in the use of functional experience areas (based on a five and a half hour day). Secondary levels could spend as much as two to two and a half hours in experience areas. Overlappings will necessarily occur in the related non-academic activities of the crafts, music, physical education, sewing and cooking programs.

Summary

With these thoughts in mind, the following list of suggested center of interest units or topics is presented for implementation in the instructional programs of Wisconsin's special classes. Frequently teachers have requested suggestions and ideas for improving their classroom activities, particularly in situations where maintenance of interest is required for pupils enrolled for a period of years with one and the same teacher. It is our sincere hope that these suggestive units will provide a spiral approach to the learnings, concepts and skills taught in special classes and requiring review, expansion and overlearning as the learner matures. The intent is to provide a special education curriculum which creates a rich, purposeful and meaningful learning environment and one which adequately meets the recurring life needs of the retarded.

> "The good classroom is characterized by a relaxed atmosphere, by evidence of wholesome activities, by displays of children's work and by the best use of available facilities."
>
> —Theodore W. Dalton

SUGGESTED CENTERS OF INTEREST FOR VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS
(after Ingram)

THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

Applicable to:	Experience Areas:
Ages 6 to 8 (Pre-Academic)	The family, the home, and school

For elementary age, retarded children with mental ages below 6-0, the emphasis is upon the development of the psychological functions, perceptual and sensory training, motor control, habit formation, personal hygiene, safety, speech and social living. These are the objectives of the trainable classes as well as the educable units. Stress is laid on the development of stability, group socialization and self-help competencies. Improved adjustment to home and neighborhood demands, or residential living, comprise the present day objectives of these centers.

Rhythms, games, arts and handwork, music and the performance of simple activities are stressed in the daily program. Guidance plays an important role in every developmental phase of the curriculum. Teaching units involve the following areas:

The Family
- The family as a group
- Mother's work
- Father's work

Having fun with our family and friends
Our brothers and sisters
Our "new" baby brother/sister
How we can help at home
Self-help activities

- Our personal appearance
- How we can care for our clothing

Our family vacation

The Home
- Common objects in the home
- Making our home safe
- The playhouse
- A birthday party

Making popcorn balls, popcorn, etc. at home
How we can help one another
How we can help one another at home

The School

How we come to school
Safety to and from school

- Things we should know about our school
- Common objects in the classroom
- Good citizens at school
- A classroom party, program, etc.
- What we saw on our walk
- Our bird-feeding station

How we can help one another

- The holidays
- Weather and news
- What we can do to keep healthy
- Our school nurse

How we can help one another at school

EXPANSION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Applicable to: Ages 8 to 10 (Primary)

Experience Areas: The neighborhood

Children of elementary age whose mental ages are above 6 years are provided with experiences in developmental reading, writing, spelling, and number concepts. Use of these developing basic skills through units and centers of interest are functionally provided through experience charts, teacher prepared materials and functional reading. Field trips and school excursions expand limited horizons and relate classroom activities, particularly in the social studies and science areas where the immediate environment, that is, the family, home and neighborhood are stressed. The educable retarded comprise the group participating in the special education curriculum at this and later levels of growth. The following units are suggested:

The Neighborhood
- Our homes
- The family
- ● A street in our neighborhood
- Being good citizens in our neighborhood
- Having fun with our family and friends
- ● Our neighborhood center
- ● The post office
- The library
- ● The gas station
- ● The theater
- ● Buying at a drug store
- ● Buying at a hardware store
- ● The train
- ● The people who live in our neighborhood
- ● Recreation and places of interest in our neighborhood

Food and Health Units
- Basic foods
- The farm
- The farmer's work
- The dairy
- ● Milk
- ● The public market
- ● The poultry show
- ● The cafeteria
- ● Buying at the market
- ● Buying at the grocery
- ● The truck garden
- ● Vegetables and fruit (spring)
- Vegetables and fruit (fall)
- ● Our health
- Improving our appearance

Neighborhood Workers and Protectors
- Safety in our neighborhood
- The policeman
- ● The fireman
- Helping children become good citizens
- ● Health workers in the neighborhood
- ● The doctor
- ● The nurse
- ● The church
- ● The carpenter at work
- ● The baker
- ● The postman
- The grocery store and supermarket
- ● Freight cars
- ● The railroad station
- ● The mail plane
- ● Self-help activities
- Using the telephone

Clothing Units
- ● The drygoods store
- ● The clothing shop
- ● The laundry
- ● The drycleaners
- ● Care and repair of clothing
- ● Shopping for clothing
- Improving our appearance

Science and Nature Units
- ● Birds (spring-fall)
- ● Fishing
- The spider
- ● The ant colony
- ● Our class pet
- Temperatures and thermometers
- A science fair
- Trees and leaves
- The calendar
- Farm animals
- Animals of the woods
- ● Seeds in spring
- ● Our class garden
- ● The weather vane
- Getting ready for each season
- Safety and health

Travel Units
- Travel in our neighborhood
- The streetcar or bus
- Going downtown
- Boats
  The passenger plane
- Local and express trains

Shelter Units
- A street of homes
- Kinds of houses in our neighborhood
- Building a house
- The apartment house
- The furniture exhibit
- Furnishing the home

WIDER HORIZONS

Applicable to:

Ages 11 to 13 (Intermediate)

Experience Areas:

The community, the city or suburbs

At the intermediate level stress is placed on the role of the individual as a member of a larger group, that is the community. Wider horizons reach out to the retarded. The basic skills are improved and all objectives sought at earlier levels are reviewed and re-emphasized spirally with expanded concepts introduced that are commensurate with levels of ability and centered about the following units:

Home Life Units
- How homes are built
- Lumber, brick, cement industries
- The forests of our state
- Heating our homes
- Lighting our homes
- Decorating and furnishing a room
- Fixing up my bedroom
- Preparing simple meals
- The purchase of groceries
- The family's recreation
- My role in the family
  The telephone
  Safety and first aid
- Obligations of family members
  Safety with and use of hand tools
  Beginning baby sitting
  Sewing and cooking activities
  Public housing projects

Food Units
- Fruits and vegetables
  The dairy
  Milk and its products
  Supermarkets
- The story of grains
- The common meats
- Fish foods
- Poultry
  Foods grown in our locality
- Foods from elsewhere
- Good nutrition and health
- The seven or five basic foods
- How our body functions
- How we get food in our community
  (field trips)

Clothing Units
- What our clothes are made of
- Keeping our clothes clean and mended
- Personal grooming
- My spring and fall clothes
- Our city, a center for the _____ industry

Units of City Life
- Area of city we live in
- Area of city we travel through
- Keeping our community safe
  The fire department
  The police department
- The city's housekeeping
- Good times in our community
  Sources of recreation
  The city parks
- Sports
- Banking and thrift
- The health bureau and the hospitals
- City industries
  Transportation of goods into and out of our city
- The safety drive
- Early city history
- City schools
- Keeping our community healthy
- The filtration plant
- The sewage disposal plant

LIFE AREAS

Applicable to: **Experience Areas:**

Ages 13 to 16 (Junior High) **Personal, social and occupational information**

At the early adolescent level an even greater proportion of time is devoted to the functional use of tool subjects in stressing training for participation in the occupational world as a competent and effective adult. At this level the special education curriculum stresses occupational information and education with particular emphasis on personal, social and occupational goals in addition to academic skills. Effective and affective living are the long-range goals sought.

At the junior level (or in junior high special classes) greatest application is made of the tool subjects in integrated centers of interest. The curriculum is greatly expanded, since chronological age levels range from 13-16 with a wide variance in mental levels, abilities and interests. Since the junior high all too frequently is the terminal point in the education of retarded adolescents, many concepts and activities are, of necessity, telescoped within the present curriculum. Where senior high classes are existent, appropriate selections should be made from this list.

Emphasis is laid upon a study of job areas and upon ways of choosing, obtaining, and holding a job. Attention is directed to unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Practical and pre-vocational activities such as within school work experience should be stressed, since they bear a direct relationship upon the future occupational adjustment of the retardate in the community. Basic skills instruction is continued. The following center of interest approaches are suggested:

Homemaking and Family Life Units
- Improving our classroom and our school
- Care of the sick

  Baby sitting techniques
- Child care
- First aid in the home
- Responsibilities of family members

  Home arts and mechanics
- Menu planning
- Laundering and drycleaning
- Preparing for family meals
- Setting the table and serving the meals
- Food preservation

  Consumer values
- Housing in our city

Occupational Units
- Various occupations in our community
- Industries in our city
- Survey of particular area of interest of individuals (service, labor, construction manipulative, mechanical, etc.)
- Field trips to local industries and services
- My abilities and limitations

  Ways of seeking a job
- Habits and attitudes toward work
- The kinds of work I am interested in

Physical and Mental Health Units

Care of person and clothing
- Appropriate clothing and makeup
- Problems of puberty
- Nutrition and balanced diets
- Our city and its health

Recreation Units
- Ways of using my leisure time to advantage
- Recreational facilities available in the area
- School clubs and activities
- Going out on a date
- Sports in our city
- Places of interest in our city
- A school camp experience

The City

The schools in my city
- The people in our city

  The government of our city
- How our city gets its food
- Transportation in our city
- Early city history
- Our city's geography as it relates to us

RESPONSIBLE ADULTHOOD AS A CITIZEN, A WORKER, AND A HOMEMAKER

Applicable to:

Ages 16 to graduation (Senior High)

Experience Areas:

Living, learning and working in the community as a responsible and contributing social being

Senior high classes are presently limited in number, and since they are a more recent expansion of services offered the retarded, they are in a state of flux. Curriculum groups are studying the problem of the more capable retarded adolescent in the senior high program, both statewide and nationally.

At this time considerable overlapping of activities and areas of study exist at the junior, senior, and vocational school levels. The compulsory school attendance law, and the magic age of sixteen necessitates inclusion of many suggested activities in the curriculum of the 13-16 year group. The retarded students located in the senior high schools represent that portion of the total group who have demonstrated considerable academic progress and approximate their peer group in emotional and social maturity.

The emphasis at the senior high, and at the vocational level is on the individual as a citizen, a worker, a homemaker and a social being. All previous learnings are crystalized in the retardate's efforts to apply himself to the task of everyday living and working in the community. Efforts are made to guide and counsel him in his application. Follow-up, additional schooling and rehabilitation are sometimes necessary. School-work experience and community work-experience programs can greatly assist him in his efforts.

Homemaking and Family Life Units

- Getting along with my family
- Obligations of family life
- Responsibilities of parenthood
- Child care and development
- Home management
- Banking and saving
- Budgeting one's income – a personal budget
- Budgeting for food, clothing, housing, health, recreation and other needs
- Installment buying
- Insurance
- Social Security
- Paying one's income tax
- Unemployment benefits
- Financial hazards (rackets)
  Consumer education
- Family obligations to the community
- Driver education – being a safe driver

Physical and Mental Health Units

Personal responsibility for health, appearance, grooming, etc.

- What is good mental health?
- Getting along with myself
- Getting along with the boss and fellow workers
- Common adult courtesies
- Concepts of sanitation and hygiene
  Good use of leisure time
- How we get our beliefs
- Making and holding friends
- Where do I seek help?

Worker as a Citizen and Social Being

- Our county
- Voting procedures
  Local, county, state, and federal government
- Duties of a citizen
- Getting along in the neighborhood
- Information a citizen should know
- Local and state history
- Boy-girl relationships
- Races, religions, and class groups
- How science arranges our way of living
- Community agencies and services
- Community recreation
- Conservation of our natural resources
- Getting along in the community (rural area, village, city)
- Responsibilities as a citizen of the city, state, and nation

Occupational Education

Survey of local industries

- Field trips to local industries and services
- The worker on the job
- Getting along on the job
- Skills and assets needed
- Labor unions
- Guarding against accidents
- Hours, wages, and deductions
- Driver education
- Work experiences in the community
- In-school employment activities
- Evaluation of work experiences
- Ways of improving job skills
- Selection of an occupation
- Vocational rehabilitation services
- Ways of improving myself after leaving school (Vocational school, night school, etc.)

The consultants on the Bureau staff are of the opinion that special education curriculum, as outlined on the previous pages, can result in realization of the objectives of education in our democratic society. We are moving "out of the woods" in a curriculum sense. The plains of effective and affective living are in sight for the mentally retarded. Their realization is in your hands as teachers of retarded children in Wisconsin.

The sequence of these suggested center of interest units is open to revision, additions and deletions, should time and experience indicate the necessity of change. We welcome and request your opinions and comments as we observe you experimenting with these activities in your classrooms.

We reiterate our invitation to participate in statewide curriculum development by selecting one of the sub-topics not yet developed (•), incorporating this unit in your classroom program, and eventually describing the activity in a format suitable for publication.